

# HINDUS AND MOSLEMS IN INDIA

J. C. FRENCH

THE ideal of representative self-government for India has existed in England for more than a century. And for many years in England earnest efforts have been made to realize it. Now they have met the age-long obstacle of Hindu-Moslem antagonism.

There are two protagonists.

\* \* \* \* \*

Congress is Hindu. It is not a legislative body. It is not really an elected one, for it is controlled by a co-opted Working Committee and President. Though claiming to represent all Indians, it is an organization of Caste Hindus, *Brahmins* (priests), *Kiasts* (clerks), and *Banias* (traders and money-lenders). The Hindu caste system, which started long before the Christian Era, is still as rigid as any which the world has seen. Entry into it is only by birth. Marriage and meals between castes are forbidden, and in some cases so is physical contact. Below the High Castes, *Brahmins* and *Rajputs* (soldiers), descend the myriad castes and sub-castes down to the Low Castes, who do menial work for the others, and the Out Castes (the "Untouchables"). Hindus of the martial races, who traditionally enlist in the Indian Army, such as *Rajputs*, have held aloof from Congress. The few instances of Western educated Hindus disregarding caste do not alter the fact that it still has a strong hold over Hindu India. Congress is not large in numbers. Recently it had no more than a million and a half members out of the total population of 300 millions in British India, of which 150 million are Caste Hindus. Still it is the only effective expression of Hindu political opinion.

It was founded as the Indian National in 1885, by graduates of the new universities established in India by Britain. Helped at its start by Englishmen and blessed by the British Viceroy, it represented an Oriental brand of Gladstonian Liberalism. But soon something entered it larger and stronger than itself, and finally completely possessed it. This was Hindu nationalism, a resolution to make India again a Hindu land and restore the glories of the Hindu rule as they were before the Moslem invasion. One aspect was the growth of Hindu secret revolutionary murder societies representing the Left Wing of Congress.

---

Though directed against the British administration, the Moslems in India were their ultimate objective.

\* \* \* \* \*

The word Moslem brings us to the second great protagonist in the Indian struggle. Moslems, often called Mohammedans by Europeans, follow the religion of *Islam* as expounded by Mohammed the Prophet. Its intense monotheism contrasts with the many deities of the Hindus. Moslems invaded India in the eleventh century, and until the eighteenth century were the dominant military power. They have become an integral part of India. Though fewer than the Hindus, still their 80 millions represent a mass that cannot be brushed aside like a minority in a parliamentary election. Also in numbers of men capable of effective military service they are at least the equals of the Hindus. In spite of the many centuries that Moslems have been in India, Islam and Hinduism have never coalesced, but recurrently have clashed. With the *Pax Britannica* open warfare has given way to civil riots. In July this year, 50 were killed in a Hindu-Moslem riot at Ahmedabad in the Bombay Province. In the same month, on the other side of India at Dacca in Eastern Bengal, there were deaths in a similar disturbance. From the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (a leading Congress paper) of July 8 comes this glimpse of it: "At 4 p.m. this afternoon two Moslems in Hindu dress with bloodstained daggers were arrested by armed pickets near Wari—purely a Hindu locality." A boy of five was stabbed to death. Worse atrocities, on both sides, have marked some recent riots. The colourless adjective "communal" is applied nowadays to these savage conflicts, as well as to Hindu-Moslem antagonism generally.

Moslems joined Congress when it started in 1885. But, alarmed by the rise of Hindu nationalism, they left it, and in 1906 founded the Moslem League. Congress still asserts that it represents Moslems. But its claims are denied by the Moslem League, and the few Moslems who join it are regarded as quislings and given in contempt Hindu honorific titles such as *Rastrapati*. In India the word "Congress" means a Hindu party. In 1909 the Moslem League extorted from the unwilling doctrinaire Liberal Mr. (afterwards Lord) Morley separate electorates, when as Secretary of State he introduced elected councils into India. These separate Moslem electorates have always been bitterly resented by Congress. But Moslem feeling gave the British Government no alternative. The Moslem

League made attempts to work with Congress. It accepted the *India Act* of 1935, which was passed by the British Parliament to introduce self-government into India. This started in the Provinces.

Each Province, the size of a country in Europe, and like Europe differing in race and language, has an elected Legislative Assembly, which supplies Ministers for Government. The British Governor represents the Crown and has powers, called "safeguards," to intervene in an emergency, such as gross oppression of minorities. Except for this proviso, the whole administration of the Province is in the hands of Ministers responsible to the elected Legislative Assembly. Over the Provinces, and in charge of the affairs of all India, as a whole, is the British Viceroy. The *India Act* of 1935 designed that, when the Provinces should agree, a federal parliament for All India should be started, with Ministers responsible to it governing the sub-continent. In 1937 the Provincial parliaments started. Hindus controlled the majority of them. Still they resented being governed by Moslems in Provinces where the latter were more numerous. "Back to Aliverdi Khan" was the cry of Hindus in Bengal, recalling the oppressive Moslem ruler before the British came. As for the Moslems in Hindu-dominated provinces, a short experience of Hindu rule convinced them that union was impossible. Though protected by the presence of the British Governor from active oppression, still they found irritation and annoyance and what they thought humiliation. And when the Congress Ministries resigned in October, 1939, under the orders of the Congress leaders who refused to support the war, the Moslems celebrated their exit as a "Day of Deliverance." They did this in spite of the fact that it meant the end of representative government and a return to direct administration by the British Governor. Indeed this is what Hindus demanded in Moslem controlled provinces. They asked the British Government to dismiss the Moslem Ministries and take over control. It is an instance of how in India constitutional questions are completely secondary to Hindu-Moslem rivalry. Now came the question—How will Moslems fare in an All-India parliament controlling army as well as police, and with Hindus in a permanent and hopeless majority over Moslems? If Congress succeeds, as it threatens, in making the British leave India, what then will be the fate of Islam? "If they do this in the green tree, what will be done in the dry?" The Moslem League adopted the policy known as "Pakistan."

Pakistan, a recently coined word, means "The Land of the Pure." The first letters "P" (Punjab) "A" (Afghanistan) "K" (Kashmir) "S" (Sind) portray the North Indian Moslem realm which has long been one of Islam's dreams. It stands for an independent Moslem state in India. Pakistan, as demanded by the Moslem League, is in two areas. One in the north consists of the Punjab, the North-West Frontier Province (adjoining Afghanistan and sharing its language), Sind, and Baluchistan. The other in the East comprises Bengal and Assam. The rest of India, which lies between, is left to the Hindus. Like the formation of the Moslem League, like the demand for separate Moslem electorates, it is a defensive measure against the Hindus. As long as the Moslems had the protection of British rule, they were content to assert the rights of a minority. But when the British proposed to relinquish the reins of power and establish self-government in India, they found that they could no longer continue to exist in this rôle. For in the Hindu they discovered not an ally but an agelong enemy. So they were driven to assert themselves as a separate nationality, with Pakistan as its country.

What divides Hindus and Moslems? First comes religion. The burning monotheism of Islam reacts with the fervour of the Old Testament against what the Moslems consider the idolatry of the Hindus. In February this year a Moslem leader reminded his followers, "We are idol-breakers and not idol-worshippers." "Idol-breaker" was the title of Mahmud of Ghazni, the first Moslem invader of India in the eleventh century. Hinduism is of enormous antiquity. It has a high philosophy. The *Vedas*, its primeval hymns, are great poetry. Its religious epics, the *Mahabharat* and the *Ramayana*, are masterpieces of literature. Its rigid caste system, oppressive though it be, has preserved the spirit of Hinduism through more than thirty centuries. Also its hereditary crafts have acted as a kind of technical education. The Hindus regard the Moslems as barbarians who have broken into their ancient culture and civilization. To the Congress cry of *Swa raj* (Self Rule) the Moslems answer "*Swa raj* is *Ram raj*" (Ram is a Hindu god). In May this year Mr. Gandhi described the ideal independence as *Ram raj* "the Kingdom of God on earth." His use of "Ram," one of many Hindu gods, exactly confirms Moslem suspicions. The Moslem is an ardent proselytiser. No man can become a Brahmin or a Rajput except by birth.

To the Moslem all the Faithful are spiritually equal in the sight of Allah. The difference extends far beyond religious belief, to culture, education, food, and costume. A Moslem looks to Persia and Arabia for his classics, and writes in the Persian script from right to left, starting on the back page of the book. A Hindu has his own ancient literature, and has an alphabet resembling ours. In food, the Moslem eats the cow, the Hindu worships it. "It is not the imperial (British) lion but the eternal (Indian) cow which divides Indians." Low Caste Hindus keep pigs, Moslems abhor them. The gulf between Islam and Hinduism is not a mere difference of articles of religious faith and dogma. "It is a difference in life, in tradition, in history, in all the social things that constitute a community." In short, it is a different "Way of Life." Congress charges the British, first, with creating, and second, with nourishing Hindu-Moslem disunion. As for the first charge, a glance at Indian history suffices to refute it. Mahmud of Ghazni has had his followers down to the present day. And Hindus have responded with equal fanaticism. In reply to the second charge, apart from its cynical immorality, such a policy would be directly contrary to British interests. Hindu-Moslem clashes cause enormous trouble to British administrators and serious loss to trade and commerce. Would British merchants in India tamely submit to such injury? Their friends in parliament in England would soon make their voices heard.

The war emphasized the cleavage between Moslems and Congress. Though the Moslem League as a body declined to give its support to the war until it received conclusive assurances against Hindu domination, still it offered no opposition to its members doing so as individuals. Thus the Chief Minister of the Punjab, a Moslem Leaguer, pledged to the war his Province as "the sword arm of India." And Moslems enlisted in the army to the feasible limit. Congress, on the other hand, having failed to blackmail the British Government into surrendering political dominance to them in October, 1939, compelled their Ministries in eight Indian provinces to resign. And it tried, but with hardly any success, to hinder the war effort in India. In 1942 Sir Stafford Cripps was sent by the British Government to get the political leaders, both Congress and Moslem, to share in the administration. They were promised a national convention which would draw up a constitution for India after the war. Congress refused, as they were not given complete control of the government to the exclusion of the Moslems. Mr. Gandhi

impressed by Japanese victories, jeeringly called the offer "a post-dated cheque on a crashing bank." Encouraged by the threat of a Japanese invasion, Congress started violent disturbances which threatened our military communications in India. Moslems kept aloof from this attempt at rebellion.

As Mr. Jinnah, President of the Moslem League, says, the Congress attack was really aimed at the Moslems. The British Government was struck, as it stood in the way of Hindu domination of Islam. This is true of previous attacks by Congress on the British administration in India. The hostile conduct of Congress in the war was not shared by the mass of Hindus. Martial Hindu races, such as *Rajputs*, *Sikhs*, and *Mahrattas*, supported the war as vigorously as the Moslems, and many other classes of Hindus enlisted in the rapidly growing army. The result was the largest voluntarily recruited force which the world has ever seen, two million men. During the war a prominent member of Congress, Subhas Bose, went to Germany as the friend of Hitler and thence to Japan. In Malaya and Burma, to help the Japanese to invade India, he formed the "Indian National Army." It was composed of a group of Indian prisoners of war, who were deceived by him or yielded to threats and ill treatment by the Japanese. The conduct of these poor dupes was in striking contrast with that of the majority of their comrades, who faced sometimes even torture and death rather than betray their military faith. Congress displayed boundless admiration for Subhas Bose's "patriotism", while disclaiming legal responsibility for his treason. With the defeat of the Japanese in Burma, the Indians with them were captured. But only those accused of ill treatment or murder of their Indian comrades in arms were put on trial. Congress defended some of them with enthusiasm and glorified them as national heroes. They were convicted, but the British Government at once remitted the sentences in response to "popular feeling" (manufactured by Congress). Congress had been taunting the Moslem League with its lack of interest in these quislings. So the Moslem League took up the defence of one of them. He got a well deserved sentence of seven years imprisonment. Congress now jeered at the Moslem League for its failure. Mr. Jinnah called the Government's remission of the sentences in the Congress defended cases "a record blunder." Still the contrast between the Congress success and the Moslem League failure stung the Moslems to fury.

In March this year a Cabinet Mission arrived in India, three British Cabinet Ministers, empowered to fulfil the promise of 1942 of independence after the war. This promise was that Indians should devise their own constitution. But the word "Indians" includes both Hindus and Moslems, and the Cabinet Mission, like numerous predecessors in the past, failed to get them to agree. So in May it published its own proposals, a draft constitution, an Indian constituent assembly to consider it, and an interim government to be composed of Congress and Moslem leaders. The Moslem League accepted the constituent assembly, with the hope of a "complete and sovereign Pakistan," and reserving the right to modify or revise its policy at any time. It started negotiations for entering the interim government. Congress held out for better terms. On June 16 the Cabinet Mission, at the end of its patience, announced that it was setting up an interim government, and rashly stated that it would do so whether Congress or the Moslem League entered or not. The Moslem League waited for the Congress decision.

After a few days Congress accepted the constituent assembly with the aim of getting a "united" India (under Congress and therefore Hindu control), but refused to enter the interim government. The Cabinet Mission immediately sent for Mr. Jinnah, President of the Moslem League, and told him that the scheme for an interim government must be postponed owing to the Congress refusal. Mr. Jinnah went straight to the Moslem League, which passed a resolution agreeing to enter the interim government. The Cabinet Mission then adjourned the negotiations for an interim government, and appointed a "Care-taker" government of the Indian Civil Service. This was all it could do, for Hindus would never submit to Moslem rule over All India, any more than Moslems would tolerate such a government by Hindus. Only an impartial and aloof British administration has so far kept the peace. But the Cabinet Mission should never have made their rash statement of June 16, that it would form a government with or without Congress or the Moslem League. The Cabinet Mission then returned to England. They left India worse than they found it, for they had aroused the hostility of the Moslems, who had hitherto regarded the British as just, if sometimes dense, arbiters. On July 29 the Moslem League rejected the Cabinet Mission's scheme, and refused to enter the constituent assembly. Mr. Jinnah described

the Cabinet Mission as "cowed by Congress threats" and "propitiating the goddess Congress." The Moslem League resolved on "Direct Action" (resistance by force). This marks a turning point in its history. Hitherto, in contrast to Congress, which regularly indulges in violent and illegal action, the Moslem League has always followed legal methods. It declares that the British Government has shown signs of deferring to Congress, both in the quisling courtmartial and in the question of the interim government. The Cabinet Mission's constituent assembly scheme has safeguards for Moslems. But Moslems have already had experience of this species of protection at a time when they felt the British Government to be aloof and impartial. Of what value will it be, they argue, when, as they believe, the British Government is inclined to defer to Congress? And what makes this deference seem strange to Moslems is that on its war record Congress in many countries would be classed as quisling and "collaborationist." Anticipating the Moslem League, on July 8 Congress started getting ready for trouble by enrolling volunteers under Indian officers dismissed for joining the Japanese. Congress is irritated with the Communists in India because they egg the Moslems on to Pakistan. So far Russia's public interest in India has been confined to its normal attacks on British "imperialism" in press and radio.

\* \* \* \* \*

If Hindus and Moslems clash, all Hindus, including the vast masses who do not belong to Congress, such as the martial races, will fight "for the ashes of their fathers and the temples of their gods." The Hindus burn their dead, and worship their gods in temples. All Moslems will join in defence of Islam, including such opponents of the Moslem League as some of the Pathans of the North-West Frontier Province, who for local reasons work with Congress, but whose master impulse is a fanatical devotion to Islam. Talk of electorates and constitutions gives the occasion but not the cause of the quarrel. The issue is a simple one—Is India to be Hindu or Moslem? Civil war threatens. Pakistan is no solution and will equally produce strife, for there will be large Hindu minorities in the Moslem state, and masses of Moslems under Hindu rule. The sides seem evenly matched, and neither may gain decisive victory. If the British leave India, civil war and chaos follow. A temporary alliance of Hindus and Moslems would merely postpone this



fate. For vital differences would soon tear them apart. Now it may be argued that the British cannot keep India in leading strings for ever, and that, whatever the risk, India must one day be allowed to find her own destiny. *But is this the time?*

In the present unregenerate age a certain Power, like Nature, abhors a vacuum. The choice is not between British control and Indian independence, but between the British Empire and some foreign empire in India.

---